

Just as we show respect for the Temple of God, the sacred objects and ceremonies, so too, we show respect for the servants of God who are consecrated to his service. It is through them that we receive the Grace of God in the Mysteries, without which salvation is impossible.

The wrong attitude towards and failure to co-operate with parish priests by many self-willed Orthodox Christians is one of the main causes of spiritual and material stagnation in any parish. This attitude stems from ignorance of the purpose of our lives, the purpose of the Church and the role of the parish and parish priest. The purpose of our lives is to be united to God and to grow in His likeness in order to attain deification (theosis.) This can only be achieved through our participation on the Mysteries, especially Holy Confession and Communion, and through our ascetical struggle to fight against the passions and live according to God's commandments. It is only through the priests that we can receive guidance in our struggle and spiritual nourishment in the Holy Mysteries of the Church. The priesthood is to the Church what the heart is to the body. Just as the heart pumps blood to the body so the priests have the authority to distribute the deifying Grace of God

to the members of the Body of Christ. This authority was given by Christ to His Apostles who passed it on to their successors, the bishops and priests up unto this day.



Some parishioners refuse to assist their priest because of his character, peculiarities or even nationality. But this does not give them justification for not upholding him. Perhaps if he were working for himself, but he is not, because he is ordained by God and working to save our souls. Even if we do not care for his person, we should care for his office, his powers and his apostolate and should assist him in the cause for which he is striving.

The way we treat a priest, in his priestly capacity, is the way we treat God Himself, for Christ said: "He, who rejects you, rejects Me." (Luke 10:16) He who abuses or despises a priest is guilty of dishonouring God, and deserves the same chastisement as those who abused and despised the Son of God. St John Chrysostom said that the lack of respect for ecclesiastical superiors is the source of all evil.

We must not only be loyal to our priests in their difficult labour of saving our souls but we must also obey them in spiritual matters and take heed to their counsel.

They are specially trained for their ministry and through the Gift of the Holy Spirit they know better than

us what we require. The Apostle Paul directs us to, "Obey your superiors and be subject to them, for they keep watch as having to render account of our souls." (Heb. 13:17) The Apostolic Constitutions (Book 11, Part 33) teach us to obey our spiritual fathers, "Because they received from God the power of life and death, the power to judge sinners and condemn them, but of those who repent, to loose them from sins and return them to life."

One of the ways in which we show our reverence for the Priesthood is by asking our priests and bishops for their blessing. We receive a blessing in the following manner:

1. We approach the priest or bishop without making the sign of the Cross
2. We place our right hand, palm upward, on our left hand in the form of the Cross
3. We bow our heads and ask the priest to bless us, saying, "Father, bless!"
4. The bishop or priest makes the Sign of the Cross in blessing over us, then places his right hand in our palm.
5. The person who has received the blessing then kisses the right hand which blessed him as a sign of love and

respect for the authority of the office held by the bishop or priest and in thankfulness for receiving a blessing from the Lord's representative.



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